Sleep More for Better Results

It's a well known fact that exercise and diet are important for weight loss, but what about sleep? In this day and age, people are working longer hours, sleeping less and the most common response to 'how are you?' is no longer, 'great thanks', its 'bit tired'. They always say "get between 7-9 hours sleep every night"! But why? Lets see what happens when you don't get enough zzz's at night.

First up, I know when I am tired, I get bad sugar cravings. Give me chocolate or toast, or both! Nutella on toast anyone? The body craves sugar or carbohydrates when you are tired because it wants energy. And what gives you a nice quick spike in energy… sugar. Will power also requires energy, so being sleep deprived affects your ability to say no to the daily temptations of the cookie jar at work, the fundraiser chocolates, or the slice of banana bread with your coffee. All making it that much harder to stay on track with your diet. Weight loss efforts… not so great.

Secondly, who has the energy to have an awesome high intensity workout when they are tired? Either the alarm goes off in the morning for your 6am bootcamp and you roll over and think 'Im too tired, didn't get enough sleep, ill miss my workout this morning' and the alarm is reset. OR you finish a long hard day at work and you look at your gym bag in the boot of your car and say 'not today, im too tired'. It is hard to find the motivation to exercise when you are not getting enough sleep. Regular exercise helps on the weight loss journey, so once again, weight loss efforts decrease when you dont get enough sleep.

Thirdly, who can be bothered making dinner after a long sleepy day at work? Might get some take away on the way home for dinner instead… Once again, diet begins to stray, weight loss efforts diminishing.

That's the obvious stuff, but what about the technical stuff like hormones? Sleep affects your production of Ghrelin and Leptin, also known as, your hunger hormones. Put in simple terms, ghrelin tells your brain to eat and leptin tells your brain that you are full. Sleep deprivation leads to an increased level of ghrelin (eat more hormone) and decreased level of leptin (you are full hormone). You then eat more than you usually would because ghrelin is telling you to eat and leptin is telling you that you are still not full and to keep eating. Then there is cortisol, the stress hormone. Cortisol levels are increased when you don't get enough sleep, which then increases appetite, contributes to poor blood sugar control and excessive fat storage. High stress also increases cortisol but that is a topic for another day. Sleep deprivation also affects insulin sensitivity. Low insulin sensitivity affects the metabolic capacity to use carbs for energy, and instead these carbs are stored as fat. So not only are there the obvious cravings, lack of energy and bad food choices, but there is this hormonal sh*t storm being created within the body which is jeopardizing all your hard work and weight loss efforts.

So what can you do to get a better night sleep? Have a bed time, and a wake time and stick to it! Even on weekends. Your body likes a schedule and it allows your body clock to function at its best. Create a bedtime routine. Have a shower, read a book, do some meditation or yoga, something to wind down and relax the body. If your brain doesn't turn off, try counting deep rhythmic breaths. If you are focused on your breathing and counting, you wont think about anything else. And ban electronics, if they are there, it is way too easy to youtube funny cat videos. Get rid of them, then you have nothing better to do than close your eyes, count your breathing and get a great night sleep J